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ABSTRACT

The literature curriculum needs to broaden its scope to make for a richer set of experiences for students. First, interdisciplinary learnings need adequate emphasis--this means that students should have ample opportunities to relate content from the social science, academic sciences, mathematics, the fine arts, and physical education. Second, the literature curriculum should assist students to extend their thinking. Third, students should experience a literature curriculum that develops interest in learning. Fourth, students need to experience a literature curriculum that emphasizes critical thinking. Fifth, purpose in reading and learning in the literature curriculum is vital. Sixth, self selection of books in literature provides situations involving students feeling ownership of the ongoing experience. Seventh, meaning theory is important to the reader of quality literature. Eighth, students should have a voice in how to be evaluated in the literature curriculum. Ninth, balance needs to be in evidence pertaining to homogeneous and heterogeneous grouping when studying literature in its diverse manifestations. Tenth, students should have ample time to reflect upon what has been learned. (NKA)

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The Student, Teacher, and the Literature Curriculum.

by Marlow Ediger

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M. Ediger

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THE STUDENT, TEACHER, AND THE LITERATURE CURRICULUM

Objectives for a quality literature need to be selected carefully and thoughtfully. Each objective is important for students to achieve in reading good literature. Frequently, writers/speakers stress that students should achieve the following knowledge ends of instruction:

1. characterization.
2. setting of the story or novel.
3. theme as presented by the writer.
4. plot or what happened in the literary selection.
5. irony and/or satire
6. point of view.
7. fiction and non-fiction (Ediger, 1988, Chapter Ten).

These are important objectives, but do no go far enough in a quality literature curriculum. Which ingredients may be added to make for a comprehensive curriculum?

Increasing the Scope of the Literature Curriculum

The literature curriculum need to broaden its scope to make for a richer set of experiences for students. First, interdisciplinary learnings need adequate emphasis. This means that students should have ample opportunities to relate content from the social sciences, the academic science disciplines, mathematics, the fine arts, and physical education. Students should then be assisted to notice and think of subject matter as being related. With an integrated literature curriculum, students perceive knowledge and content as being one, rather than as separate component parts. The integration of ideas results in being able to remember and recall information more readily as compared to a separate subjects curriculum. One idea then triggers another idea due to the relationship of ideas. If content is perceived as having isolated parts, it is more complex to have this triggering of ideas (Ediger, 2000, 20-29).

Second, the literature curriculum should assist students to extend their thinking. The literature selection being taught should provide a springboard for students to think of additional content that they would desire to read. To extend thinking, learners need to be guided by the instructor to identify questions for which answers need to be sought. These questions become problem areas to stress a problem solving philosophy as a higher cognitive objective. John Dewey (1859-1952) was a leader in stressing experimentalism, as a philosophy of problems solving with its five flexible steps:

1. students identify problems with teacher guidance.
2. students read and gather information from a variety of literary sources.

3. students develop an answer or hypothesis to the problem area.
4. students do additional research to check the chosen hypothesis.
5. students refute, modify, or accept the original hypothesis (See Dewey, 1916).

Extending experiences is a major objective of instruction in literature. Problem solving is a vital skill to develop for use in school and in society.

Third, students should experience a literature curriculum that develops interest in learning. Interest is a powerful factor in learning. With interest in literature, students have a thirst for acquiring ideas, facts, concepts, and generalizations. Within the student there is a desire to do more reading without any form of compulsion or force. Intrinsically, the student reads quality literature during spare time. Literary works are also taken home to read voluntarily. The desire to read is there with interest being developed in literature. There are numerous ways to develop interest in reading. The instructor needs to model interest and enthusiasm for literature by discussing with students what he/she has read.

Fourth, students need to experience a literature curriculum that emphasizes critical thinking. Being able to separate facts from opinions, accurate from inaccurate information, as well as detecting bias and bandwagon approaches is salient. Critical thought is important in literature as well as in all of life. Each individual is bombarded with messages from diverse media; content here needs to be appraised using desirable criteria.

Closely related to critical thinking is creative thought. Unique, novel ideas are presented in the creative thinking arena. Tried/"true" and conservative ideas may not work well in life itself. In literature, writers present creative ideas which include metaphors, similes, slang, analogies, alliteration, onomatopoeia, themes, and ways of presenting unique ideas for student reading. Thus, it behooves instructors to assist students to analyze, synthesize, and evaluate content in terms of meanings involved (Ediger, 2000, 503-505).

Fifth, purpose in reading and learning in the literature curriculum is vital. Thus, students need to perceive purpose in consuming literature. Reasons for learning are then in evidence. Students who are taught purpose for the literature curriculum have an increased energy level for reading. Developing reasons for doing something increases the wish to achieve, accomplish, and grow. The author when supervising student teachers in the public schools has noticed how public school students truly do more reading and read on a greater variety of topics and genres in literature when purpose is involved. Extending the literature curriculum is quite in evidence since learners read more books by the

same author or on the same topic.

Sixth, self selection of books in literature provides situations involving students feeling ownership of the ongoing experience. Too frequently, students participate in what is assigned to them. With self selection of reading materials, the student is empowered and owns the literature curriculum. Generally, students tend to choose those books which are of interest and on their personal reading level. Many students start to read more and enjoy literary selections when they do the selecting. Then too, many problems in reading are hurdled when the literature being read is on the understanding level of the learner.

Seventh, meaning theory is important to the reader of quality literature. Reading literary selections that are too complex makes for feelings of frustration.If the content is too easy, boredom and a lack of interest may be forthcoming. Meaning theory stresses students attaching understanding to what is being read. The familiar statement of "it makes sense" may be expressed by students when the literature being consumed is meaningful. Sometimes a student will say, "This just doesn't make sense." Meaningful explanations or questions of learners may illicit meaningful response. If content is not meaningful, it is up to the instructor to clarify and explain to make it meaningful.

Eighth, students should make some kind of use of selections in literature which have been completed in reading.The following are examples of uses to be made:

a) perceive specific relationships in literature to another curriculum area such as the social studies. Here, the student mentions in class how one specifically relates directly to the other.

b) a student states how a character in a selection is just like one that is known to the self.

c) a learner emphasizes how the setting in the story being read is so different from the local area. Here, a comparison was made in climate, temperature readings, and rainfall amounts.

Eighth, students should have a voice in how to be evaluated in the literature curriculum. Multiple Intelligences Theory (See Gardner, 1993) emphasizes that there are eight different intelligences from which a student may select in order to be assessed appropriately:

a) verbal/linguistic. Here, a student may take a paper/pencil test, write a summary or journal entry, showing and revealing that which was learned.

b) visual/spatial. Art products may be developed indicating comprehension of content read. Many students can indicate well what has been accomplished through making a mural, pencil sketching, and/or drawing several illustrations to reveal understanding of the literature selection completed in reading.

c) logical/mathematical. A student may prefer to indicate what has been learned through a logical reasoning approach. The philosophical

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mind may orally wish to demonstrate the logic of lack thereof in the author's reasoning. Logical thing definitely can be the intelligences possessed by the involved learner.

d) musical/rhythmic Even at a young age, there are students who are quite gifted/talented in music. Thus, a poem has been written and set to music, based on what was read in a literary selection. Setting words to music may be a favorite way of indicating what has been learned by those possessing musical/rhythmic intelligence. An opportunity is then presented to show in a chosen talented way that which has been achieved in ongoing lessons within a unit of study.

e) interpersonal. Students who prefer to be assessed within a group/committee setting may choose this method of assessment. Selected students who attain well within a committee may be assessed while working together with others.

f) intrapersonal. These learners possessing intrapersonal intelligence do better with individual as compared to group endeavors. Here, the individual reveals achievements by providing a product/process completed by the self. He/she progresses more optimally with an individual piece of work.

g) bodily/kinesthetic. Those possessing athletic prowess may choose an approach involving the small and gross muscles to show achievement. Construction objects as items directly related to what has been learned might well indicate quality achievement. Industrial arts activities, careful planned and implemented, might well show achievement and progress.

h) scientific. This intelligence is well revealed by learners in pursuing science units of study with a hands on approach in learning. Hands on approaches include using experiments and demonstrations. Science and the methods of science are also contained in literary selections, in a separate subjects or interdisciplinary curriculum.

Ninth, balance needs to be in evidence pertaining to homogeneous and heterogeneous grouping when studying literature in its diverse manifestations. Thus, there are times when students might well benefit most from being grouped with students of similar achievement in literature. Or, at other times, students may achieve more in mixed ability levels, such as in heterogeneous grouping. The yard stick to use when thinking of how students should be grouped for instruction is to emphasize optimal achievement for each learner. Under which grouping procedure will learners more likely achieve the objectives of the literature unit being emphasized presently? This question needs answering when implementing a particular plan of flexible grouping students for instruction.

Tenth, students should have ample time to reflect upon what has been learned. Reflections involves recalling, creative and critical thinking, relating, synthesizing, applying, rehearsing, analyzing, and

comprehending. (Ediger, 2000, Chapter Two).

Students need to experience a quality literature curriculum. Such as curriculum has carefully chosen objectives for student attainment, aligned learning opportunities, and assessment procedures that truly determine what students have learned. To have an updated literature curriculum, instructors need to experience inservice education activities. Thus, workshops and departmental meetings should be in evidence. These inservice opportunities should assist instructors to improve the quality of instruction. Ideas gleaned need to be tried out in the classroom. Instructors should report back to the workshop participants/departmental members how well the new approach in teaching benefited students.

A professional library should be available to instructors to secure innovative ideas in teaching students. The professional library should contain the following:

1. professional journals devoted to improving instruction.
2. teacher education textbooks with content that upgrades the literature curriculum.
3. video-tapes/video disks that instructors may observer to secure models for instruction.
4. internet capabilities to obtain online Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC) publications. Each manuscript selected by ERIC emphasizes some facet of education, while many stress teaching and learning research articles or professional opinions. These can be readily downloaded in terms of summaries for the different manuscripts.
5. special facilities need to be available for instructors to read and share ideas gleaned from reading and observing models (Ediger, 1997, 179-182).

In addition to a good professional library, instructors should

1. attend professional meetings on the state and national levels. There are excellent sessions at these meetings to secure worthwhile ideas for teaching and learning in literature.
2. write journal articles to be submitted for publication. Good teaching suggestions need to be shared with others in order to improve instruction.
3. discuss problems in teaching with other professionals in order to diagnose and remediate deficiencies in teaching.
4. team teach so that a broader range of ideas for quality teaching of students are in evidence.
5. use creative ideas in teaching so that the interests and purposes of students are continually kept in primary focus.
6. permit student choices in terms of projects to be pursued, as

well as discussion in class of student initiated questions.

7. have high realistic expectations of student achievement and progress.

8. promote student interest and appreciation for good literature.

9. take much interest in the hobbies, interests, and talents of each student as very worthy individuals.

10. have students feel a sense of belonging and acceptance.

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